IN THE CLAIMS

Cancel claims 9-12 and 21-24, and add new independent claims 27 and 28 in their place, respectively, as follows:

1. (previously presented): A method of operating an image-based item processing system to process an entry which is a unit of work comprising a plurality of batches of physical document items, the method comprising:

(a) determining whether a group of physical tracer document items is associated with the entry; and

(b) associating a unique group of logical tracer document items with the entry when the determination in (a) is negative.

2. (previously presented): A method of operating a distributed image capture proof-of-deposit system having a central processing site and a number of branches connected via a network with the central processing site, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) capturing at a branch images of a plurality of batches of physical document items associated with an entry without using a group of physical tracer document items;

(b) transferring the captured images from the branch via the network to the central processing site;

(c) receiving at the central processing site the images transferred from the branch; and

(d) associating a unique logical group of tracer document items with the images received at the central processing site so as to allow the received images of physical document items to be later processed as if the plurality of batches of physical document items associated with the entry had been processed with a unique group of physical tracer document items.

3-6. (canceled)

7. (previously presented): A method of operating an image capture proof-of-deposit system at a central processing site to process a plurality of batches of physical document items associated with an entry without using a group of physical tracer document items, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) capturing images of the physical document items; and

(b) associating a unique group of logical tracer document items with the captured images of physical document items so as to allow the captured images to be later processed as if the physical document items associated with the entry had been processed with a unique group of physical tracer document items.

8-12. (canceled)

13. (previously presented): An image-based item processing system for processing an entry which is a unit of work comprising a plurality of batches of physical document items, the system comprising:

means for determining whether a group of physical tracer document items is associated with the entry; and

means for associating a unique group of logical tracer document items with the entry when the determination is negative.

14. (previously presented): A distributed image capture proof-of-deposit system having a central processing site and a number of branches connected via a network with the central processing site, the system comprising:

means for capturing at a branch images of a plurality of batches of physical document items associated with an entry without using a group of physical tracer document items;

means for transferring the captured images from the branch via the network to the central processing site;

means for receiving at the central processing site the images transferred from the branch; and

means for associating a unique logical group of tracer document items with the images received at the central processing site so as to allow the received images of physical document items to be later processed as if the plurality of batches of physical document items associated with the entry had been processed with a unique group of physical tracer document items.

15-18. (canceled)

19. (previously presented): An image capture proof-of-deposit system at a central processing site for processing a plurality of batches of physical document items associated with an entry without using a group of physical tracer document items, the system comprising:

means for capturing images of the physical document items; and

means for associating a unique group of logical tracer document items with the captured images of physical document items so as to allow the captured images to be later processed as if the physical document items associated with the entry had been processed with a unique group of physical tracer document items.

20-24. (canceled)

25. (previously presented): A method of operating a distributed image capture proof-of-deposit system having a central processing site and a number of branches connected via a network with the central processing site, the method comprising:

(a) capturing at a branch images of physical document items without use of a group of physical tracer document items;

(b) transferring the captured images of physical document items from the branch via the network to the central processing site;

(c) receiving at the central processing site the images transferred from the branch;

(d) assigning a unique entry number to all batches of document items received from the branch during a predetermined period of time;

(e) creating a group of logical tracer document items based upon the assigned unique entry number; and

(f) associating the group of logical tracer document items with all batches of document items received from the branch during the predetermined period of time so as to allow further downstream processing of the batches of document items at a later time.

26. (previously presented): A distributed image capture proof-of-deposit system having a central processing site and a number of branches connected via a network with the central processing site, the system comprising:

means for capturing at a branch images of physical document items without use of a group of physical tracer document items;

means for transferring the captured images of physical document items from the branch via the network to the central processing site;

means for receiving at the central processing site the images transferred from the branch;

means for assigning a unique entry number to all batches of document items received from the branch during a predetermined period of time;

means for creating a group of logical tracer document items based upon the assigned unique entry number; and

means for associating the group of logical tracer document items with the batches of document items received from the branch during the predetermined period of time so as to allow further downstream processing of the batches of document items at a later time.

27. (new): A method of operating an encoding workstation of an image-based

item processing system to process physical document items which are contained in a number of document trays without using a group of physical tracer document items in the document trays, the method comprising the steps of:

(a) determining whether a group of physical tracer document items is included in a tray of physical document items;

(b) associating a unique group of logical tracer document items with the tray of physical document items when the determination in step (a) is negative;

(c) assigning a logical pocket number to each logical tracer document item in the unique group of logical tracer document items;

(d) for each logical tracer document item, encoding a physical blank document item with information associated with the particular logical tracer document item; and

(e) for each encoded item of step (d), routing the encoded physical document item to a physical pocket which has been assigned the logical pocket number of step (c).

28. (new): An encoding workstation of an image-based item processing system for processing physical document items which are contained in a number of document trays without using a group of physical tracer document items in the document trays, the encoding workstation comprising:

means for determining whether a group of physical tracer items is included in a tray of physical document items;

means for associating a unique group of logical tracer document items with the tray of physical document items when the determination is negative;

means for assigning a logical pocket number to each logical tracer document item in the unique group of logical tracer document items;

for each logical tracer document item, means for encoding a physical blank document item with information associated with the particular logical tracer document item; and

for each encoded item, means for routing the encoded physical document item to a physical pocket which has been assigned the corresponding logical pocket number assigned thereto.